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ABSTRACT

Electronic technologies and collection development are two of the top concerns in library and information science today. The challenges of integrating electronic resources and technologies into the process of collection development are many, and many-faceted. Beyond task-oriented considerations, such as the selection process itself, there are large-scale management issues, such as budget, policy, personnel, and technology. Three areas of collection development that seem to be the most problematic are selection, acquisitions, and inter-institutional cooperation. Several authors suggest comprehensive approaches to library collection development in an electronic age. One informative success story is the selection model developed at an academic library as a means to mainstream electronic resources. The model involves breaking the task into manageable units, developing expertise in selecting resources regardless of format, and anticipating impacts throughout the institution. An important component is a standing committee that reviews electronic publications. One model for cooperative collection development is OHIOLink, which is a consortium of 17 academic libraries; specifications for OHIOLink include ease of use by collection managers, regular provision of data for routine reports, and the capability to collect and analyze usage data across the system. In view of serious fiscal concerns in collection development, one author has outlined a seven-part agenda for rethinking priorities: planning, allocating, faculty liaison, cooperative collection development, evaluating, acquisitions, alternatives, and selection efficiency. (Contains 13 references.) (Author/AEF)

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by Linda Schamber

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Library Collection Development in an Electronic Age

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Introduction

Electronic technologies and collection development are two of the top concerns in library and information science today. In a recent analysis of the literature, four major trends in library and information science, were identified: increases in end-user access to computer-based information resources; library use of networks and telecommunications; dependency on CD-ROM-based information sources; and emphasis on collection management activities (Brennan, 1991).

Clearly, collection management is a fundamental concern. Demas puts the matter into perspective this way: "Electronic publishing has profound implications for collection development, which is defined as the intentional and systematic building of the set of information resources to which the library provides access. While the principles of collection development, which were developed in the world of print publications, do not change radically with new publishing technologies, methods of decision making and specific selection guidelines must be adjusted significantly to incorporate new publishing formats" (1994, p. 71).

Although most of the current literature cited below refers to academic or research libraries, much of the content applies to all types of libraries. This digest will focus on problems and solutions of practical interest to all librarians.

The Challenges

The challenges of integrating electronic resources and technologies into the process of collection development are many, and many-faceted. Beyond task-oriented considerations, such as the selection process itself, there are large-scale management issues to consider such as budget, policy, personnel, and technology. Some of the biggest problems, not surprisingly, stem from simultaneous decreases in funding and increases in operating costs. Collections budgets are at special risk because they are not directly connected to the number of staff positions or level of user services (Otero-Boisvert, 1993). Academic libraries note impacts of electronic technologies on research, such as increasing demands for electronic searching capabilities, demands for access to machine-readable scholarly texts, and use of network discussion groups for scholarly communication (Shreeves, 1992).

Three areas of collection development that seem to be the most problematic are **selection, acquisitions,** and **inter-institutional cooperation.** Two themes pervade the discussions: the shift in library philosophy from ownership of locally stored resources to provision of access to electronically stored resources; and the need for rethinking collection development policy, both to support the new philosophy and to better deal with new types of resources on a day-to-day basis.

• **Selection:** An updated textbook on collection development by Evans contains an entire chapter on electronic materials in which he first emphasizes the importance of needs assessment. "The electronic environment," he says, "creates several dichotomies . . . print versus electronic; ownership versus access; user versus institutional need; free versus fee; gatekeeper versus user selection. It is not a matter of either/or, rather it is a matter of determining the proper local mix" (1995, p. 260). The next step in the selection of electronic materials is the formulation of collection policy and practice. Evans discusses formats and selection issues, and provides two valuable sample documents: a sample policy for electronic resources management, including 41 selection criteria related to library policy, vendors, technical concerns, costs, and local needs; and a checklist for CD-ROM products and subscriptions.

Although many selection criteria for electronic resources are the same as those for print, electronic resources present special problems. For example, LaGuardia and Bentley (1992) provide a list of questions to ask when selecting CD-ROM resources. These questions are related to administrative costs and effort, vendor reliability, and technical hardware and software requirements. In addition to these considerations, Shreeves (1992) discusses matters of markup or tagging that affect perceptions of the quality and authenticity of scholarly texts in the humanities.

• **Acquisitions:** Acquisitions staff experienced the most changes with the advent of automated processing. From the beginning, automation eased the labor of this detail-intensive and repetitive work. Improvements continue with enhanced integrated library systems, and time-sharing services from bibliographic utilities or vendors (see Evans, 1995, Zhou, 1994).

The most radical change, however, is not related to technology, but to policy. Smith and Johnson suggest that libraries "reverse the approach that they have followed throughout the print era: rather than buying as much as they possibly can to respond to any present or potential need, they should acquire only the most heavily and regularly used material for processing and retention" (1993, p. 392). They suggest that nothing should be purchased on the basis of long-term planning. The single criterion should be current user satisfaction, with a goal of fast and effective delivery or access, not ownership.

• **Inter-institutional Cooperation:** The tradition of cooperative collection development and resource sharing among libraries began decades ago as means to alleviate problems of lack of space and costly duplication, especially for little-used materials. Now, with electronic networks facilitating cooperation, the lines are blurring as to what constitutes ownership and resource sharing. Because of the vast storage capacity of electronic media, space is no longer the issue. Rather, the issue for libraries is the role they should play in access provision and document delivery when end-users have direct access to OPACs and myriad other information resources available through network connections (Evans, 1995).

Crowe and Sanders (1992) see these technology-driven changes as actually increasing the need for cooperation and communication among institutions. In order to continue to provide effective physical access to documents, libraries must increase cooperation to overcome potential funding and management problems, such as communication failures, and lack of standard access and authority for resource sharing.

The ultimate vision, according to Summerhill (1992), is a single network to be shared by library personnel and end-users—in effect a restructured inter-library lending model. He foresees innumerable opportunities for sharing information resources via electronic networks. Libraries will be called upon more than ever to make decisions about mounting databases on local systems, and providing access to remote resources and services.

Meeting the Challenges

Several authors suggest comprehensive approaches to library collection development in an electronic age. Evans (1995) provides an excellent general overview of collection development policies and fiscal management for libraries as a whole. A highly informative success story is the comprehensive selection model developed at Mann Library over the past decade as a means to mainstream electronic resources into the library. Demas (1994) says the model involves breaking the task into manageable units, developing expertise in selecting resources regardless of format, and anticipating impacts throughout the institution. An important component is a standing committee, the Electronic Resources Council, that reviews electronic publications and thus continues to define the role of collection development. Two innovative concepts in this model are those of "information genres," which covers both print and electronic formats, and "tiers of access," which refers to degrees of technological support for electronic access.

Crowe and Sanders (1992) describe OHIOLink, a consortium of 17 academic libraries, as a model for cooperative collection development. The success of such a project, they say, depends on an aggressive commitment by its organizers. Specifications for OHIOLink include ease of use by collection managers, regular provision of data for routine reports, and the capability to collect and analyze usage data across the system. Seven functions, such as the ability to analyze collections and to form cost projections, are specifically intended to aid collection management.

Finally, in view of serious fiscal concerns in collection development, Shad (1992) outlines a seven-part agenda for rethinking priorities: planning, allocating, faculty liaison, cooperative collection development, evaluating, acquisitions alternatives, and selection efficiency. Although the agenda does not directly address the challenges of new technologies, it is geared toward responding to the overriding issue of the changing philosophy from ownership to access.

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